



Comité technique



RÉGARDS SUR LE FONCIER n°7

Structures agraires et accès des jeunes à la terre

Gestion intrafamiliale du foncier et stratégies d'autonomisation des jeunes

Contributions aux journées d'études de juillet 2018

MAI 2019



RÉGARDS SUR LE FONCIER n° 7

La collection « Regards sur le foncier » du Comité technique « Foncier & développement » accueille des articles offrant un point de vue critique et original sur les questions foncières dans les pays du Sud. Elle permet de valoriser les contributions des membres du Comité et de son réseau aux travaux et journées de réflexion du groupe. Tous les articles sont disponibles en version française et mis à la disposition du public sur le portail www.foncier-developpement.fr. Des traductions en anglais peuvent être proposées pour les articles dont la portée le justifierait. Cette collection bénéficie d'un appui financier du projet multi-pays d'Appui à l'élaboration des politiques foncières, de l'AFD.

Pour plus d'information sur cette collection, contacter le Gret qui assure le secrétariat scientifique du Comité : secretariatCTF@gret.org

Les publications de cette collection n'engagent que leurs auteurs et leur contenu ne représente pas nécessairement la vision et la position du Comité technique « Foncier & développement ».

La revue bibliographique et les communications présentées dans ce numéro de « Regards sur le foncier » sont issues de journées d'études organisées par le Comité technique « Foncier & développement » dans le cadre du chantier de réflexion collective sur les « Systèmes agraires et l'accès des jeunes à la terre ». Ce chantier de réflexion a été conduit par Agter et Scafr-Terres d'Europe et a été jalonné de plusieurs rencontres permettant d'éclairer les dynamiques à l'œuvre aux niveaux national et continental.

Les études de cas présentées dans ce numéro viennent éclairer à travers des travaux empiriques menés sur différents territoires les enjeux liés à l'autonomisation des jeunes et illustrer la diversité de leurs parcours. Il s'agit d'un champ d'intérêt particulier pour la Coopération française, qui développe des analyses et stratégies d'intervention sur la manière d'accompagner le développement des territoires ruraux. La prise en compte des enjeux intergénérationnels et des dynamiques d'évolution des exploitations familiales vient ainsi utilement alimenter ces réflexions.

RÉFÉRENCE POUR CITATION :

MERLET Michel, LEVESQUE Robert, RANGE Charline, BENKAHLA Amel (dir.), *Structures agraires et accès des jeunes à la terre : gestion intrafamiliale du foncier et stratégies d'autonomisation des jeunes*, Regards sur le foncier n° 7, Comité technique « Foncier & développement », AFD, MEAE, Paris, mai 2019.

PHOTO DE COUVERTURE :

Terrasses cultivées, rizières de bas-fond, hameau et tombeau familial (à droite), Hautes Terres de Madagascar, région Vakinankaratra, juin 2017. © Hadrien Di Roberto

Young farmers in Thailand: small numbers, but diversified projects

Cécile Cochetel³³, Kassirin Phiboon²³⁴, Nicolas Faysse³⁵

INTRODUCTION

Thailand is a major exporter of agricultural products and agriculture. The role of the agricultural sector in the Thai economy seems to have remained relatively constant over the past 20 years. The contribution of agriculture to the country's gross domestic product and has not changed much over the past two decades (from 9.1 % in 1996 to 8.6 % in 2016, according to the World Bank, 2018). From 1993 to 2013, the number of farm holdings increased by 5.0 % (from 5.6 to 5.9 million according to the agricultural censuses organized in these two years), which paralleled a similar increase of 5.5 % of the entire population over the same period.

However, behind the apparent stability at national level, and as in many Asian countries, the farming population in Thailand is ageing. The average age of farmers has increased from 47 in 1993 to 54 in 2013. Figure 1 compares the age distribution of farmers in Thailand and in various countries of the European Union, in the United States and in Japan. It presents the ratio of farm holders under the age of 35 versus those that are older than 65. Thailand is currently situated in an average position in Figure 1, based on the 2013 census. However, the difference between Thailand and other countries becomes clearer when looking at the dynamics. The position of France in Figure 1 did not evolve much between 2000 and 2011. By contrast, the position of Thailand evolved quickly between 1993 and 2013. In a village in the Northeast region of Thailand, in 2008 farmers were 55 on average, while they had been 36 on average 25 years earlier (Rigg *et al.* 2012). If no specific action is taken, Thailand may continue to move towards the bottom-right corner of Figure 1 in the forthcoming years.

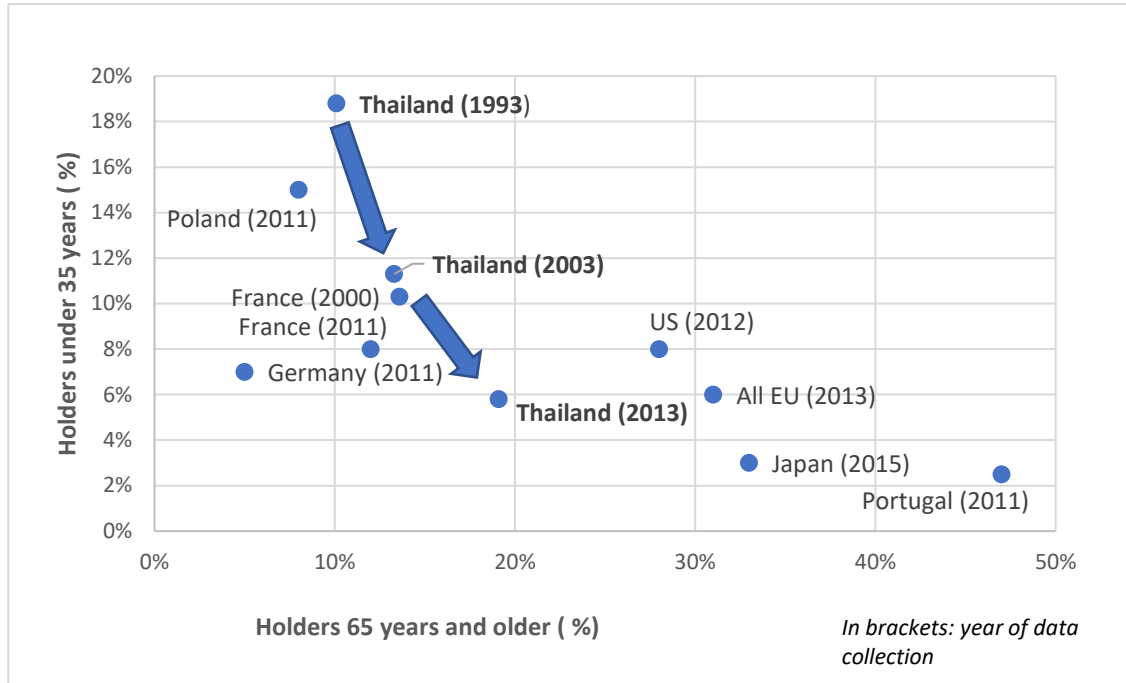
These evolutions bring strong changes in farm organizations and lead to several challenges. Firstly, for many older farmers, farming has become a complementary source of income, alongside other sources (e.g. pensions and remittances, see Rigg *et al.*, 2018). Secondly, a vicious circle based on three elements is increasingly present: ageing farmers may be less inclined to innovate and to look for more productive farming practices (which often require investing time and capital and taking risks). Older farmers may in particular be reluctant to invest in their farms if they do not clearly identify a family member who could take over the farm once they retire. This leads to low-profitability farming, as many studies in Thailand have shown over the past years. Because of low profits, many young people are not attracted by farming, and thus the average age of farmers is increasing. These changes may lead to a crisis in the agricultural sector in Thailand in the forthcoming years.

³³ Montpellier Supagro.

³⁴ Thai Water Partnership.

³⁵ Cirad, G-Eau Research Unit, Montpellier University and Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok. Contact: faysse@cirad.fr

Figure 1. Farmers' age distribution in different countries



From Faysse, 2017b.

The Thai government is increasingly aware of these challenges. Policies have been designed to accompany ageing farmers, especially in terms of producing for home consumption (see Box below). However, there is also an opportunity to support the installation of young farmers in order to design relevant policies that can achieve this objective, it is necessary to have a better understanding of the diversity of characteristics and problems faced by young farmers in Thailand. The present study aims to contribute to filling this gap by providing a preliminary assessment of ***who are the young farmers in Thailand, what difficulties they face in the early stages and how they actually benefit from existing support programmes***. This study took place in Prachinburi Province (Central Region) and in Chiang Mai province (Northern Region).³⁶

Agricultural policies in Thailand

A wide range of agricultural and rural development policies have been implemented over the past three decades in Thailand (Marzin and Michaud, 2016). These policies have enabled a major decrease of poverty rates in rural areas. Current agricultural policies can be typified into three groups. Firstly, over the past two decades, the government organized a series of short-term programmes - or schemes - to support rice prices on the domestic market. These programmes played a major role not only in the agricultural sector but also in national politics (Ricks, 2018). The latest of these schemes was launched in 2011 and, when the Army organized a coup in 2014,

³⁶ This text is a shortened version of Cochetel and Phiboon (2017).

a key argument it put forward to justify its intervention was to stop such schemes, which led to huge public expenditure.

Secondly, a series of policies aim to support “self-sufficient economy”. This approach was developed at the end of the 1990s, in rejection of contract farming, which had led farmers to produce only one crop that, often, they could not eat. Many of these farmers engaged in contract farming had fallen into debt cycles. According to the self-sufficiency approach, farmers should produce various crops, they should be able to satisfy their own consumption needs and they can market the surplus. This concept has been increasingly seen as relevant for ageing farmers (Hirokawa, 2014). Programmes implemented under such an approach support diversification for example: farmers can receive training on how to grow various crops, and they can be granted some tree seedlings.

Thirdly, a more limited number of policies aim to increase farm productivity and profitability. For instance, in 2016, the government launched a policy of “large-scale schemes”, whereby small-scale farmers are encouraged to combine efforts to collectively decrease production costs and increase selling prices. However, to date there have been limited initiatives to organize a typology between farmers who may be supported towards self-sufficient farming and farmers for whom farming is the main source of livelihood and who may be supported to achieve better productivity and profitability (Faysse, 2017a).

I. METHODOLOGY

We consider that a young farmer is someone who has at least 6 months of farm experience and who is under 45 years old. We included young farmers that still work on their parents’ farm and do not yet have their own farms. We interviewed 83 farmers in 2017, both currently young farmers and former young farmers. The latter are farmers who are over 45 years old (and less than 55) but who started as young farmers. We also interviewed 12 staff members from different support programmes. Numbers of interviewed farmers in each category are described in Table 1.

We built a typology of young farmers. This typology was not based on the type of agricultural production (such as farming using chemical inputs versus organic farming) or on farm size. Instead, we chose to use a typology based on the general orientation of farms, i.e., the linkage between farm characteristics and the objective of the farmers. This typology was based on the following questions: what is the farming system (e.g. farming of only one crop versus farming a diversity of crops), what is the farmer’s vision of farming (e.g. self-sufficiency, farming in the same way as parents, coming back to live in the community, living in an environmentally-friendly way, etc.) and how both are related. Eventually, five types were identified.

II. DIVERSE FARM ORIENTATIONS

1. TYPE 1. “MAIN CROPS” FARMERS

This group of 21 farmers involves farmers that focus one or two types of production: rice and/or shrimp or fish. They are children of farmers and most of them stopped formal education after finishing primary or secondary school. They have not diversified their farm activities and they do not plan to change their farming system. This is the case of Mrs. Thidarat (Box 1).

Mrs. Thidarat, a farmer producing main crops

Mrs. Thidarat is 41 years old. Her parents were rice farmers. After she graduated from senior high school, she worked in a factory as a seamstress for 15 years. She decided herself to be a farmer because her parents passed away, so she had to come back and take over the management of her parents' farms. She is a full-time farmer and considers that she earns a satisfactory income from rice production. Currently, she owns 6.4 ha of land and she rents 3.5 ha from a relative. She has to pay 5,000 baht³⁷ per year to rent these 3.5 ha. She grows rice twice a year. She does not invest in any farm machinery because she hires everything for rice production. She does this because she considers that she still lacks farming skills. She decided to get involved in a Young Smart Farmer programme in 2014 in order to increase her rice production skills. In the future, she would like to continue growing rice in the same way as now.



Mrs. Thidarat at her farm

2. TYPE 2. “MAIN CROPS AND DIVERSIFICATION” FARMERS

The 21 farmers of the “Main crop and diversification” type are focusing on one type of production (as farmers of Type 1), such as rice, shrimp, fish or vegetables. Contrary to farmers of Type 1, Type 2 farmers want to change their farming system, for two reasons: they want to have a better income and/or they want to increase their self-sufficiency. Consequently, they attempt to diversify their farming systems. They have done so by initiating a small fruit and vegetable garden for family consumption (in order to reduce the household's living costs) or they have started a new production (such as fish or shrimp breeding).

³⁷ In April 2018, 1 euro = 38.5 baht.

Mr. Santi, a farmer producing main crops and diversifying his production

Mr. Santi is 42 years old. He is married and has three children. His wife is working with him on the farm and he has a secondary occupation (he works at a tourist site). He started farming with his parents, on their farm, after he completed high school. His parents did not own any land and they had to rent it. He started his own farm on rented land when he got married, about 15 years ago. He usually rents between 2.5 and 3.5 ha each year. The farmed area depends on what he plans to grow and what he earned the previous year. He focuses on one or two main crops such as sesame, corn and rice, and he uses chemical products.

In 2012, he joined the “New Farmer Development Programme” managed by the Agricultural Land Reform Office in order to acquire his own land. He acquired 0.3 ha in 2013, although he did obtain a formal land title until 2017. He started integrated farming of fruit and vegetables (such as eggplant, banana, melon, passion fruit, avocado, guava, morning glory, stevia, etc.) on these 0.3 ha.

Mr. Santi plans to stop renting the land and to live only from the 0.3 ha obtained from the Agricultural Land Reform Office by selling directly to consumers and processing some products such as sun-dried banana or stevia tea. He plans to stop renting land when he earns enough money from farming the land he obtained from the Land Reform Office. He is also trying to set up a group of farmers that acquired land from this office in order to be able to meet the demands of intermediaries, who ask for large quantities of products.



Khun Santi at his farm, on land obtained from the Agricultural Land Reform Office

3. TYPE 3. “BUSINESS-ORIENTED” FARMERS

These 9 farmers started farming because they think that it is a promising way to earn a satisfactory income. None of farmers interviewed of this type has been a farmer since high school. They graduated from university with a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree and half of them are not children of farmers. Moreover, several of past work experience in cities. They practise “innovative farming”, which involves capital-intensive investments, such as greenhouses equipped with drip irrigation or hydroponic farming.

Mr. Em, a “business-oriented” farmer

Mr. Em lives with his parents, who are also farmers, but he has his own farm. He is 27 and graduated from Chiang Mai University with a Bachelor’s degree in Economics. After graduating, he worked for a major agribusiness company in Thailand for almost 3 years, buying corn from farmers for animal feed. He decided to leave his job because he was often travelling and wanted to spend more time with his family. He started farming at the beginning of 2016. His parents gave him 0.6 ha. His main agricultural production is mushrooms. He also grows bamboo, mango and longan. Before starting farming, he contacted farmers and asked to visit their farms in order to decide what kind of crops he could grow to earn a good income.

He faced many difficulties when he started farming. He is the only young farmer in his village and his parents did not understand why he decided to leave his job to start farming. So, he decided to join a programme called “Brave man return home” in order to build up his network and discuss farming with other young people. This 5-month programme involved seminars and meetings.



He grows mushrooms in 6 greenhouses and gets one harvest every 20 days, throughout the entire year. He manages to earn a very good income (about 53,000 baht per month of net income). His Bachelor’s degree was useful for his market research and designing a business plan. His parents now look positively on his success and his mother sometimes helps him by selling the mushrooms he produced at the market when he is too busy.

4. TYPE 4. FARMERS AIMING AT “ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY” PRACTICES

The 20 farmers in this group are mainly practising organic or chemical-free agriculture (sometimes they still farm part of their farms using chemicals). They grow mainly fruit and vegetables on small-scale farms (less than 3.2 ha). They sell their products through specialised channels: organic/chemical-free markets or organic product selling groups. They do not have a major investment plan for their farm. Their main goal is to reduce their use of chemicals on their farm (if not already the case) and/or to diversify their production.

Mr. Pee Chai, a farmer aiming at environmentally practices

Mr. Pee Chai is 42. He started to work on his parents' farm when he was young. He has had his own land since 2012. He inherited land from his father. He worked for two years as a mechanist, but he was bored and preferred to come back to his hometown in order to help his parents.

He grows 0.32 ha of paddy fields, whose harvest will be used for the consumption of the extended family (including his parents). He also grows 0.8 ha of organic produce (fruit, vegetables, bamboos, herbs, teak) for the benefit of his own family (wife and 2 children). Farming is his sole occupation and he sells his products to an organic selling and packaging group. He has obtained a group organic certification. In the future, he plans to build his own house on his land and to decrease his living costs by installing more solar panels on his farm in order to pump water and generate electricity for domestic consumption.



5. TYPE 5. "RURAL DEVELOPMENT" FARMERS

Similarly to Type 4 farmers, the 12 "Rural development" farmers grow organic fruit and vegetables. Some of them also grow rice and breed animals. They practise integrated farming on small-scale farms. Less than half of them are full-time farmers, because they are involved in other activities relating to rural development or more specifically to the development of their village. For example, they run an agro-tourism business (coffee shop selling local products, homestay) or they are involved (sometimes as leader) in a processing, packaging and selling group. None of them have been farmers since childhood: they had past working experience in cities before becoming farmers or studied at university.

Mr. Sarawut, a farmer engaged in rural development

Mr. Sarawut is 31. He started farming 11 years ago after working 3 months in a factory. He greatly disliked working in a factory: he wanted to be his own boss. He has been farming 1.3 ha since he started farming: his parents gave him 0.3 ha and he bought 1 ha. He bought some land thanks to an interest-free loan from an NGO, to be reimbursed over 10 years. He grows 0.5 ha of fruit (bananas, longan), 0.5 ha of vegetables and 0.3 ha of rice. He also breeds cows and goats.

Mr. Sarawut is a member of a community enterprise located in his village. This community enterprise involves young people and it processes, packages and sells organic products grown by villagers. Young members of the enterprise meet every week to work on processing and packaging, using machines bought by their enterprise. They also opened a coffee shop where they process and sell the organic



group's products. Mr. Sarawut also processes some products on his own. For instance, he makes yogurt and cakes from goat milk. In the future, Mr. Sarawut wants to breed more animals in an organic way and he wants to obtain certification for processed products to be able to sell to supermarkets.

6. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG FARMERS PER TYPE

Table 1 describes the main characteristics of young farmers per type. Type 1 and Type 2 farmers have, on average, completed high school (12 years of study). The group with the highest level of education is Type 3, as they have spent 17 years on average in education (higher qualification than a Bachelor's degree). The farm size of Types 4 and 5 farmers is relatively smaller than Types 1 and 2, but they often produce much more capital and labour intensive crops than Types 1 and 2. Apart from some Type 2 farmers that initially started as Type 1, generally young farmers have continued farming with the same farming systems and orientation since they started.

Table 1. Characteristics of types

	Type 1. Main crops	Type 2. Main crops and diversification	Type 3. Business orientation	Type 4. Environmentally friendly practices	Type 5. Rural development
Number of farmers interviewed	21	21	9	20	12
Average number of years in education	11	12	17	14	15
% of children of farmers	100 %	95 %	50 %	90 %	84 %
% of full-time farmers	43 %	33 %	44 %	90 %	42 %
Average farm size (ha)	5	5.8	9.9	2.2	1.3

III. INITIAL DIFFICULTIES

Table 2 presents the difficulties that young farmers faced during the first 5 years after they started farming. More than half of Type 1 ("Main crops") and Type 2 ("Main crops and diversification") farmers reported that they did not face **any difficulties specifically related to starting farming**. Indeed, most of these farmers are children of farmers and started farming along with their parents: they faced the same general constraints as their parents, such as water-related problems and marketing. Similarly, 75 % of farmers from Type 5 ("Rural development") did not face any difficulties when they started farming. One possible explanation is that these farmers previously worked or went to university. They often took time to develop their business plan before starting farming and sometimes they had acquired professional experience from previous occupations.

Table 2. Main difficulties involved in starting farming

	Type 1: “Main Crops”	Type 2: “Main crops + diversification”	Type 3: “Business”	Type 4: “Env.- friendly”	Type 5: “Rural development”
Non-understanding or scepticism of parents and villagers	0	0	2	6	1
Access to land	3	2	0	0	0
Difficulties with agricultural production (lack of knowledge, pest and diseases)	2	2	3	2	1
Floods or drought	2	2	0	1	0
Harsh working conditions	0	3	1	4	2
Insufficient funds	0	1	0	3	0
Marketing	0	1	1	0	0
No issue	14	10	3	4	8
Total	21	21	10	20	12

Farmers from Type 3 (“Business”) and Type 4 (“Environmentally friendly practices”) faced two main kinds of difficulties: 1) **technical difficulties**, such as a lack of knowledge or the necessity to work hard in the first years, and 2) **social difficulties**: the misunderstanding of their parents (who often asked them why they had left their jobs in cities) and/or the scepticism of villagers regarding their innovative way of farming. Indeed, both types engage in innovative farming, focused on new products and capital-intensive farming for Type 3 farmers, and focused on organic farming for Type 4 farmers.

Table 2 also shows that **access to land does not appear as a main issue**. This is probably because when young people decided to start farming, they had already solved the issue of access to land. Indeed, 76 % of farmers interviewed acquired access to some land thanks to their family (they inherited land or their parents gave them a part of their land). This is a main difference with young farmers in Europe, who may start the process of setting up even when the issue of access to land is not initially solved. Because of this, land (to buy and to rent) is the most important general constraint for young farmers throughout the European Union (Zondag *et al.*, 2015).

IV. SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

The Thai government has set up two main programmes at national level to specifically support young farmers. Since 2014, the **Young Smart Farmers** programme supports sharing of farm experiences and building networks thanks to farm visits and seminars. Since 2014, this programme has trained approximately 25 farmers per year in Chiang Mai Province (i.e. approximately 100 young people trained by the end of 2017). In Prachinburi Province, 94 farmers have been trained since the programme was launched in 2014.

The **New farmer development programme** was launched at national level in 2008 by the Agricultural Land Reform Office. The aim was to provide land to farmers after a 6-month training course. There are two types of allocated farmland: public land reform area (where farmers do not

have to pay anything) and private land reform area (farmers have to pay a rental fee). In Chiang Mai Province, the programme was launched in 2012, and from the beginning of the programme until October 2017, 21 farmers acquired access to land. On average each farmer received 0.3 ha. In Prachinburi Province, the programme was also launched in 2012 and 7 farmers acquired some land. On average, they obtained 0.7 ha per person.

However, until 2017, these two national programmes only benefitted a relatively limited number of young farmers in Chiang Mai and Prachinburi Provinces. Young farmers also benefitted from programmes not specific to young farmers, such as training activities.

Among farmers interviewed, 43 farmers had been involved in at least one support programme. Table 3 presents the benefits that farmers gained from these programmes. The most common benefit for all types is technical support. Most Types 1, 2 and 3 did not benefit from financial support. Type 4 farmers obtained a wide diversity of support, because in Thailand, many programmes support organic farming.

Table 3. Benefits that farmers gained from participating in support programmes

	Type 1. “Main Crops”	Type 2. “Main crops + diversification”	Type 3. “Business”	Type 4. “Env.- friendly”	Type 5. “Rural development”
Access to land	0	0	0	1	4
Free farm inputs	2	2	0	2	0
Knowledge on farming techniques	9	6	4	8	5
Networking (meeting farmers/sharing experience)	0	2	2	5	5
Access to funding	0	0	0	5	0
Access to market	0	3	0	2	0

Table 4 identifies the linkages between the main difficulties expressed by the farmers and the main benefits they got from participating in support programmes. This table shows a rather incomplete overlap between the difficulties expressed by young farmers and the type of support provided by programmes.

Table 4. Connection between the main difficulties faced when young farmers started farming and main benefits of participating in support programmes

	Main difficulties when starting farming	Main benefits from programmes
Type 1. Main crops	Difficulty with agricultural production, access to land, water	Technical support
Type 2. Main crops and diversification	Arduous work, difficulty with agricultural production, access to land, water	Technical support, access to markets

Type 3. Business orientation	Difficulty with agricultural production, social acceptance	Technical support, networking
Type 4. Environmentally-friendly practices	Social acceptance, harsh working conditions, lack of funds	Technical support, networking, funding
Type 5. Rural development	Harsh working conditions	Technical support, networking, land access

CONCLUSION

This study shows firstly that there is **no one type of young farmer** but a **diversity of profiles**. Thai young farmers have different origins and characteristics, and they want to achieve different things. Current programmes do not explicitly take this diversity into account. Support programmes may be improved by **addressing the diversity of the constraints they face and by taking diversity of profiles into account**.

It would be of interest to expand the study with a larger number of farmers, in particular in order to consider differing farming systems in other provinces of Thailand. Moreover, the present study focused on already established farmers. In 2018, this preliminary work will be completed by two studies. One will focus on young rural people and another will focus on students in agricultural vocational schools. Both studies will interview young people that have not yet fully decided whether they would work in the non-farming sector or whether they would become a farmer. They will assess to what extent these young people would be ready to engage in farming and, if so, which type of farms they would be interested in becoming engaged with.

REFERENCES

- Cochetel, C. and Phiboon, K. (2017). The diversity of young farmers in Chiang Mai and Prachinburi Provinces: orientations, problems faced and engagement with support programmes. Unpublished paper.
- Faysse, N. (2017a). Dwindling or thriving? Making sense of the diversity of agricultural and rural dynamics in Thailand. *NIDA Development Journal*, 57(4), 1-14.
- Faysse, N. (2017b). Policies to support young farmers: an international review and a first look from a Thai perspective. Unpublished paper.
- Hirokawa, S. (2014). Integrated agriculture from the perspective of the creation of employment in the aging society of rural Northeast Thailand. *Journal of Human Security Studies*, 4(1), 78-96.
- Marzin, J. & Michaud, A. (2016). *Evolution of rural development strategies and policies: lessons from Thailand*. Document de travail Art-Dev 2016-4.
- Ricks, J. (2018). Politics and the price of rice in Thailand: Public choice, institutional change and rural subsidies. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 1-24.
- Rigg, J., Salamanca, A. & Parnwell, M. (2012). Joining the dots of agrarian change in Asia: A 25-year view from Thailand. *World Development*, 40(7), 1469-1481.
- Rigg, J., Salamanca, A., Phongsiri, M., & Sripun, M., 2018. More farmers, less farming? Understanding the truncated agrarian transition in Thailand. *World Development*, 107, 327-337.
- Zondag, M. J., Koppert, S., de Lauwere, C., Sloot, P. & Pauer, A. (2015). *Needs of young farmers: Report I of the Pilot project: Exchange programmes for young farmers*. Brussels: European Commission.